

NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORKS

Moderator: Michele Higgs
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3:00 p.m. (EDT)

Operator: Thank you for standing by and welcome to the Let's Get Organized: The As Through Zs of Organizational Development conference call. This call is being recorded. At this time I'd like to turn the call over to Ms. Michele Higgs. Michele, please go ahead.

Michele Higgs: Thank you, Sarah. Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the Neighborhood Networks November conference call. The topic, as you heard, is Let's Get Organized: The As to Zs of Organizational Development. My name is Michele Higgs and I'm one of the Technical Assistance coordinators working with you to address the technical assistance needs of the various Neighborhood Networks around the country.

Our speakers for this afternoon have a wealth of information to impart. But before I introduce them I want to remind the multi-family Neighborhood Network Centers that the Strategic Tracking and Reporting Tool, also known as the START

Business Plan, contains resource materials that help you to look at the capacity of your center and provide the foundation upon which you can organize your activities. It will help you to survey your residents' interests and needs as well as examine the workings that make up your centers' operations. It will help you to capture information for developing a budget or creating an internal marketing plan. START is also key in the crafting of partnerships in that it strengthens the center's profile as a business and makes it attractive to potential partners. These partnerships are vital when considering how your center can and will grow.

If you have questions about the START Business Plan, resident surveys, internal marketing plans, or general questions pertaining to Neighborhood Networks, please go call the toll-free Neighborhood Networks information line at 888-312-2743. You can also visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org. Again, toll-free, call 888-321-2743 or visit the Web site at www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org.

I also want to remind listeners that an audio and verbatim transcript of this call will be made available on the Neighborhood Networks site in about two weeks.

This afternoon our intent is to help you get a handle on the activities behind the activities of your center. Before the curtain goes up on a Neighborhood Networks center it is imperative to know where it fits among all the other activities and challenges that center staff and property managers must deal with. That

requires organization. Our speakers today will help you look at the importance of managing time, space, people, and money, not necessarily in that order, when it comes to making your centers successful.

Speaking of successful centers, I encourage you to visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site and I remind you of the address, which is www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org. There you can flip through a number of success stories that will acquaint you with how successful Neighborhood Networks centers work.

Now, let me tell you about a few successful centers-to-be. We have seven. Liberty Plaza Resource Center, in Minnesota; New Horizons Village Neighborhood Network Center, in Michigan; Matheson Apartments Computer Learning Center, in Massachusetts; Lakewood Christian Manor, in Georgia; Laverne Court Learning Center/Mercy Housing Resident Lab Technology Center, in Illinois; Cunningham Manor Neighborhood Network Center, in Texas; and Trinity Terrace Computer Lounge, in Wisconsin. A hearty welcome to each of you. Welcome to the neighborhood.

Now today, we have three seasoned professionals who will address the topic of organizational development and hopefully spark your curiosity. Ladies first. We have Patsy Fletcher, a consultant in the area of community development, having worked with public housing authorities, tenant associations, and nonprofit

organizations. She has also worked with Neighborhood Networks for the past five years providing technical assistance in organizational development to centers as well as consortia. We also have Louise Williams, an educator from the state of New Mexico, who has 18 years of experience with a nonprofit community-based organization. She is multifaceted, having served in roles from IT technician to education coordinator and employment counselor. Finally, we welcome Donald Sykes, an executive with skills in managing nonprofit and government agencies as well as in private industry. He has worked effectively in a multi-cultural environment providing leadership and guidance to his staff and interacting with government units and diverse volunteer boards. I think you will get a lot from this presentation, so sharpen your pencils. Patsy, would you like to begin?

Patsy Fletcher: Sure. Good afternoon. I'll get right into my presentation.

In my experience with nonprofit management and with Neighborhood Networks centers, managers are always operating at a premium in a time crunch. So what I'm offering, I hope, are some measures that promote efficiency in the long run. After all, that is what we hope that you're about—delivering useful quality services over time. I have four points that I would like to make. Some of these will overlap or be reinforced by the other speakers, which only emphasizes their importance.

My first point is the mission statement. In my view, a mission statement should be used as your guiding light. In so many instances the mission statement is kind of nonsensical, with words like “our mission is to work towards” or “we endeavor to.” But a good mission statement has built-in measures and action words: “we provide,” “the Neighborhood Networks center stands for.” It should be a statement—the kind of statement or statements that in moments of crisis, as invariably there are, a kind of statement that acts as a beacon to show where you should be going or a motivation for taking some hard steps. When in doubt, the mission statement serves as a foundation. The mission statement should be simple and easily recited. A couple that you all are probably aware of: “Connecting people with nonprofit information”, “Always low prices”—some of you I'm sure will recognize that. So that even with the most doubting of volunteers, or future employees, it's clear what you stand for and what is clearly outside of your mission. The mission statement shouldn't be something that you just check on occasionally when you pull up your START plan, but it should be a statement that you live by every day.

My second point is that effective nonprofits use good for-profit principles. I don't care how warm and fuzzy your mission is, how sweet the kids and their parents are, as an organization and a service deliverer you're expected to quantify your mission, your programs, your goals and achievements, and you're expected to be able to show how closely you have met those standards. In a recent survey of charitable organizations the question was asked, “Do you believe that

nonprofits should use business criteria to measure performance?” And guess what the overwhelming answer was: “Yes”. So I'm only telling you what you already know. So within that, you should know the bottom line. Good for-profit principles help you understand what the bottom line is. That is, how many services were performed, what was the outcome, [and] how much did it cost per outcome. And this information is useful not only for yourself and the people you serve, but also for your donors or potential donors. They want to know this information as well. And recall, you're handling the public and donors' money and you need to be accountable and demonstrate effectiveness.

Professionalism has a place in nonprofits. Here are some really simple ones. For instance, develop and maintain a schedule. So, for example, if you announced to the community that your center is open from 10:00 a.m. till 5:00 p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, be open, unless there is some extreme emergency, which should be rare. Whether users come or not, over time you demonstrate your reliability. People know they can count on the center being open at that time. And if people still aren't coming in the numbers that you would like, then you know you need to add something else, but at least you've got a schedule. That's just one example. Another example is developing and maintaining performance standards. So, for instance, when we ask you to keep sign-in sheets, this is not just busy-work. This is a bottom line measurement in performance. How many people are coming, what are they coming for, [and] how often do they come.

Those kinds of measures are counted by the simple sign-in sheet. On the other hand though, you don't want to become so focused on business style measurements that you compromise your mission. Again, the mission statement. There frequently are a different set of rewards which are not easily translatable into business terms.

You also need to understand that being a nonprofit does not mean there is no profit. Nonprofits can make money. They make money by being efficient and running effectively. That doesn't mean you're paying stockholders, but that money gets reinvested. It helps you add more programs and funds the programs that already exist. So a lot of agencies, a lot of centers, make the mistake of thinking that because they're a nonprofit they don't have to be concerned with money.

A third point that I'd like to make is regarding record keeping. Record keeping is extremely valuable in developing an effective organization. And the record keeping should be financial, personnel, and of course the way that the center is used. This is another place where your START tool will really help you get a handle on the record keeping. Use it for this purpose. Record keeping can be time consuming in the short run, but in the long run it will be time saving because you will have documented and recorded the way that you're performing and the way that the center is being used, [and] how much it costs. An example of record

keeping that a lot of centers shy away from is the volunteer job descriptions.

Many centers, of course, only have one or two paid staff [members and] a team of volunteers. Volunteer staff descriptions really helps you stay on point and it provides clarity to your volunteers. One of the biggest complaints of volunteers is that they weren't sure what they were supposed to be doing.

Financial training is another area where you should [focus] that will help you with your record keeping. If you've got a board or if you're handling the budget and seeking funding, you need to be able to talk about the different components of your budget, [and] you need to know what it takes financially to make your programs go. So there's no need to feel embarrassed because you may not know all of the different terms, but it, in fact, demonstrates a willingness to develop an effective organization by getting some financial training. Donors are impressed by the fact that you seem to be financially literate and therefore it conveys a degree of confidence.

It also—and your record keeping proves the point of your center—why does it exist? We are trying to get away from centers that are just open for kids to come in and do homework. We want to be able to show that it really makes a difference, the fact that the center is there, that there are computers that they use, [and] that there are instructors. And at the same time, your record keeping will demonstrate the impact that the center is having on the lives of the residents and participants. So, again, sign-in sheets, program evaluations and so on.

My fourth point is that you need to remember that people come first. And what do I mean by this? People make or break your organization. And so, it's my philosophy that they need to be included as much as possible. Let them in on the secrets; Share your accomplishments; Let them know how much the programs cost; Let me know your funding sources; Share the bottom line; And you can do this through your newsletters, annual report, [and] periodic meetings—when you have meetings, say, with your residents. Let me know what is really going on. People are willing to help, you'll find, if they know what's going on and they feel like they're included. And at the same time you want to share the accomplishments of the program and give accolades to the people who are doing well [and] who have contributed to the program. And people should be respected. Meet them where they are—whether it's the board, the residents or participants. They are your program, and so respect them for that. And, again, if you've got people who are working with you, [such as] volunteers, be willing, if possible, to get them some training. Get some training yourself. Look for free opportunities in the community. All of this means that you are paying attention to the public trust. The program, the money that supports those, they're not yours. They really belong to the people.

So those are my four points.

Michele Higgs: That sounds wonderful. I was going to go over them again, but ...

Patsy Fletcher: OK.

Michele Higgs: ... I think you pulled that off so clearly that everybody got them. I'm sorry, I hope I didn't cut you off.

Patsy Fletcher: Oh, no. Well, I was just going to—I was just going to reiterate those and then talk about the resources. But maybe you're going to do that at the end.

Michele Higgs: Yes, I got the points down and I will try to recap. But I—that was fantastic. I'm going to let Louise speak now. Louise, are you there?

Louise Williams: Yes.

Michele Higgs: OK.

Louise Williams: So, it's a pleasure to be here. Thank you. With my background with education and employment training, I understand the value of what the center is doing at the Neighborhood Networks centers with the workforce preparation side of the link. And my advice and suggestions are going to be centered around that point, preparation for the world of work. And so, in doing that, my best background would probably be to discuss—our intention is to work towards long-term employment for individuals so they can live unsubsidized with positions that

not only provide them gainful employment, but that they know that they're in a job that is not seasonal, but [that] shows retention and hope for some earnings increase. And so, I think the collaboration that I'm encouraging with the centers is to look to [the] potential of how you really might help these—help your participants, your residents, to look towards that type of viable direction for themselves. And one way I would like to recommend would be to be in touch with your partner one-stops and your communities. The Funding for the Workforce Investment Act provides and encourages partnerships and the HUD organization is a very great candidate to partner with the one-stops. And my hope would be in designing your system, is to keep that in mind that your one-stops can help you bring that level of stability to anybody that is a part of your center. One way that I would suggest that we start looking to that collaboration is that—of course you'd be wanting to establish strong systems; systems that would prepare them to start becoming a part of the one-stop system. And, of course in doing that, you want to design systems internally that will help with policies and procedures of—exactly so that everybody in—knows exactly what is the process and the procedure in order to move an individual through your systems. And ultimately, keeping in mind that every individual there needs that personal care. Treat individuals, as Patsy was saying, with care and that they do come first. So you don't see each one of your residents or anybody who comes to the center as a group, but as an individual. That's really going to be key to getting them motivated and getting them to the next step, is that you customize and recognize them with personal care.

I [also] think it's really key to keep in mind [that] staff development is so critical, that you continually take a look at where your weak link is, so that as everybody gets trained collectively and crossed trained; that everybody understands, how in your group to fill in and that they are towards the end goal of what HUD is really pushing towards with the Neighborhood Networks centers, so that staff development gives them a sense of part of the whole network.

One way that you might be able to do that is to look at phasing in different tiers of activities of how you want to get there. It can't all happen in a day, it all can't happen in one year, but to break it up into tiers of activities and provide some motivational ways that folks can approach that first level, that first tier, and complete those steps of what you want for your staff to become more professional. So, and then when your staff are prepared, then working in your centers with the residents or your customers, I think that same concept can translate down into how you provide your services. And it's visual, it's available, it's on the wall so any anybody comes through the door they can see clearly what types of services are available through your centers. So you might break it down into levels or tiers of services and then they know where they need to start, they're self-managed, and then you free yourself up by having self-assisted activities listed, staff-assisted activities listed, and that's when you might start. What we do is orientation concept, where on a scheduled date and time you have your orientation and staff then are managed to be prepared for the

orientation with handouts that break down your tiers of services. And by doing that, then the customers, as they walk through the door, they have something to reflect back when they leave. Or, they have something in their hand that they can take notes on while they're sitting during the orientation and they can walk away. Or they can raise their hand and have questions answered. So, I like that visual approach, by breaking things down real easily for customers to see it broken down by tiers. Some of it's self-assisted, some of it's staff-assisted.

And then, from there, what we have done after orientation levels is to help people through a one-on-one where then you start the customized personal care approach. And that's maybe with an initial assessment. And when you start with initial assessment, that does not have to be paper/pencil. It can be just, getting some demographic background down on an individual with as pre-application: tell us a little bit about who you are, what your needs are, what your dreams [and] your aspirations are. And it's, in a sense, beginning care management, if you will, just to recognize everybody as—in a confidential setting through an initial assessment, getting that background information. And I would recommend that that be a standard document that everybody in the centers would utilize collectively, so that you can then start pooling reporting information off of that. If you have an initial application form where your staff person sits and gets the background [and] the demographic. Then, if you have certain tiers of services that are going to be expensive on the center, you have activities that cost the center money, then your next tier of service might be more involved on your

staff's time. If you're going to be doing workshops, for example, that would be another tier. And you might have to determine, OK, how do I screen people at the initial assessment level to be able to help guide them into, if you will, a flow chart. So, once folks are assessed initially through the first sitting and visit, then you know where folks need to flow into workshops. For example, are they ready to be referred for other services because their basic needs have not been taken care of initially. So your flow chart will break down all the various services that you may need to refer your candidate to before they're ready for the next tier of services. So I would recommend you look at a flow chart and make it visual and consistent for all centers so everybody perhaps is working off the same program model.

Michele Higgs: Louise, I'm listening to you and it sounds like a really great idea for committing all of this to paper and chart. And that speaks directly to, you know, organizing activities in the center.

Louise Williams: Yes. Yes, exactly, that's where we're going to, is developing those policies and procedures and becoming as systematic as you can so that if there's ever turnover of staff you have that in place and things move more effectively.

Michele Higgs: OK, that speaks also to what Patsy was talking about with regard to record keeping.

Louise Williams: Yes, exactly. And being consistent and standardized. So, one of the things that we have talked about with the center is how to prepare people to get them to the next step. That's where the one-stop, or your other partners, need to have that preparation completed before they go to the—take the referral to other services. So, if one of the services, for example, is for child care, if somebody needs that, then you should sit down in advance with the child care programs and find out what does their application look like, what kind of preparation documents do they have to have in hand to attach to that application, and help your people in advance to know what—and that's part of staff development—what exactly are our partners out there need—what what do they need, so that when we are working with them one on one we need that we can get them as prepared as possible before sending them out on a wild goose chase. It's best to be as prepared, and that's part of quality individual personal care, knowing exactly what your partners' application and needs and documentation prior to referring anybody out. For example, if they're going to be referred to the one-stop, and the one-stop has tiers of services as well, it would be well suited for your staff development program to sit with these partners and say, OK, either can you come down and do an orientation with our folks maybe once a month and go over your program services; as well as your criteria; as well as your appropriation process. So that not only are you cross-training your staff but your participants are learning how to become resource people themselves and also learning how to prepare themselves for the next step, which would be a referral to the job market.

Michele Higgs: Louise?

Louise Williams: Yes, ma'am.

Michele Higgs: I'm sorry, I'm going to hold you off for just a moment now.

Louise Williams: OK.

Michele Higgs: I want to get Donald Sykes in here to chat for a while ...

Louise Williams: Yes.

Michele Higgs: ...And then we'll open up for questions. You've got a lot of rich information. I may call you again about a workforce development call. But can we get Donald in here real quick?

Louise Williams: Yes.

Michele Higgs: Thank you.

Louise Williams: Absolutely. You bet.

Michele Higgs: Donald, you there?

Donald Sykes: Yes, I am.

Michele Higgs: Thank you.

Donald Sykes: OK.

Michele Higgs: We're getting a whole lot of good information, but I wanted to be sure you got an opportunity.

Donald Sykes: OK. Well, I'll try and be as brief as possible. Considering that I'm not that familiar with each of these individuals' organizations, my comments are going to be, in some extent, kind of general. But I want to start by going to the question that Patsy started with, and that is the first thing is when I think about leadership and governance of these organizations, there's the question of mission and purpose; and making sure that organization has a clear mission. And I understand that many of the centers have started centered around IT, but some are even broadening their scope and doing other things. So it's important that the mission be broad but, at the same time, focused and clear. And sometimes I noticed that when I was in situations where I was funding organizations, some people came in and said we do everything. Well, you don't want to be that broad. But, what you do want to do is [to] have a focused and

clear understanding of what the mission is. This is important for funders because they want to know that you're focused and on target; if they give you money you have a real focus and orientation of what you're going to do.

And mission is also important in positioning in the community. It can help avoid turf battles with other organizations. Because you can say your mission is focused on the geographic area, or it can be focused on services such as what Louise was just mentioning in terms of the kind of services you provide, or it can be a mission that talks about your general empowerment of the community. But those are different ways in which to zero in and focus your mission so that your purpose is clear.

Second, I think it's important to have a strong strategic plan or vision. And, again, this doesn't have to be complicated. But it's really important that people understand what it is that you want to do; who's going to do things and when they're going to take place, and how do you know when you're there. I think I want to piggy-back on Patsy's comments earlier about accountability. The strategic plan or vision helps you measure whether or not you're accomplishing your goals and achieving--moving towards your purpose. It's a planning process—it's a – planning and strategic visioning [as] a continuous process, so that, you know, you have a goal, you have laid out a plan, and you should go back and revisit it regularly. Most organizations try to stretch theirs out for three years and have steps in between that can measure whether or not you're making

progress towards that end. It's your game plan. It's for you, your board, your residents, your staff, and your community to know what it is that you are about and attempting to do.

Training is also an important [factor], as both the previous speakers spoke of. If you have an advisory committee or a board, it's important that they understand the mission, the bylaws and policies and can speak to it. So when—because each of them represents a sort of PR program for your organization. And to the extent that they've been trained on the purposes and understand the mission, they can be advocates and carry your message. The same is true for staff. It's very important that they understand where they fit into the plan. And the other thing that I wanted to mention about governance is the point of having basic tools in order. Are your papers in order? Discussion of finances was also mentioned. I often tell organizations that two plus two must equal four or you're out of business. You can argue and fight about whether your program is good for a long time, but if your books are bad, that's over and out. It's like the ante in the game. So you have to have financial papers that are up to speed. You need to have your taxes up to speed. You need to know where your articles of incorporation are, and bylaws and reports. And because these are small organizations it's not necessary that these be elaborate things. They may be simply memos. But they're clear and stated. And, as Louise was mentioning, they could be posted so that people understand what your rules and policies are and there's no confusion around them. You know, it's one thing when people

understand and get along with everybody, there's no problems. But, once you have conflict, you need to have some clear rules and regulations so that people can fall back on those to resolve them.

And the most important thing I think in organizational development is: do people understand what their roles and responsibilities are. Do you have job descriptions? And they don't have to be elaborate. And as someone mentioned earlier—I think Patsy again—that even the volunteers need to have a paragraph or a description or what it is that's expected of them. These, again, are not necessarily elaborate, but you need to have them, even memos on how your policies operate and what the reporting relationships between people are. Again, when all things are going well and everybody likes each other, these things seem so unnecessary and such a, you know, a lot of busy-work. But, once you have conflict they begin to have much more importance and they can control and reduce conflict.

Managing change is also important. If you are an organization that's just getting started or you've been around for a while, hopefully you're growing. So this means that you will have to, particularly in today's world of competitive funding, change is a constant thing. So you have to upgrade your paperwork and make sure that it's up to speed in terms of the kinds of papers--paperwork I was mentioning earlier. And they must be continually updated. But, more importantly, is that you have trained your people who are able and willing to

adapt to new environments. And that means that your organization values things like collaboration and teamwork, and to reward people for collaboration and teamwork. Cross-training was also mentioned by Louise and I think that's an important element. And small organizations where you don't have a lot of opportunity to divide work responsibilities you need to have cross-training so people can fill in for each other if somebody is out.

Communication probably is the most important thing for new organizations to me. Communication must be clear. If people feel informed, if they feel that they can trust the official information that they've received, they're willing to collaborate and they will have more of a team spirit. Trust cannot take place if people have more faith in the bathroom conversation as opposed to what the official word is that's being posted on the board. So, it's really, really important to share, as Patsy mentioned earlier, and to be as open as possible. Staff and people when they participate—and not necessarily am I talking about deciding—but when they participate and discuss the policies that affect the program that they're making a contribution or commitment to, then they have more willingness to follow a team spirit and to reduce the conflicts that often come about because people don't trust the information that they have. An environment that allows for differences and people to disagree but respect individuals can help this, and that's another value that should be important and organized.

So organizations can seek—can succeed I think if they have a team spirit, if they're flexible and they have clear communication patterns and have a plan that everybody has agreed to.

And I think, Michele, I'd rather stop there and see what kind of questions people have.

Michele Higgs: All right. He did—you did a great job. It was very clear, very informative. Ladies and Donald, thank you. Sarah, I wanted to find out if there's anyone in the queue.

Operator: Thank you. The question and answer session will be conducted electronically. If you'd like to ask a question, please do so by pressing the “star” key followed by the digit “one” on your touch-tone telephone. If you are using a speakerphone, please make sure your mute function is turned off to allow your signal to reach our equipment. We will proceed in the order that you signal us and will take as many questions as time permits. Once again, please press “star one” on your touch-tone telephone to ask a question. And we'll pause for just a moment.

And we'll take our first question from Teresa Dewilde.

Michele Higgs: Thank you. Hi, Teresa.

Teresa Dewilde: Hi. You know, I've been listening and it's all fantastic and great. And, I mean, obviously I think the key to any good business is to be organized. I'm coming into a Neighborhood Networks at a property that-I don't know what was being done before, because when I showed up our computers had been stolen so it was closed. So I'm wondering if any of you have advice for very quickly kind of, other than general organization, steps for figuring out who [and] how to get it running properly again.

Michele Higgs: Anyone can take that one.

Patsy Fletcher: Yes, this is Patsy.

Teresa Dewilde: Hi, Patsy.

Patsy Fletcher: I would say in your instance, that first you need to get a good understanding of the budget ...

Teresa Dewilde: Right.

Patsy Fletcher: ... and what it is that you, you know, can purchase, spend ...

Teresa Dewilde: I have no budget. I have donations only.

Patsy Fletcher: OK. So then you need to do an assessment of what it will take to run the center.

Teresa Dewilde: Got it.

Patsy Fletcher: So if the computers are gone, what is going to cost to replace the computers? How many do you want to get in? What is it going to cost for your time and the hours keeping the center open for certain hours?

Teresa Dewilde: Right.

Patsy Fletcher: Does that then mean that you are the primary person who works with people who come in? You might want to survey the residents and find out what they use the center for, what they'd like to use the center for. And then I would say—and this is probably a very quick and simple approach—but I think you need to do, you know, as much information gathering and then begin within the budget that you have drafted to try to get resources to then begin to get the center operational.

Teresa Dewilde: That's wonderful.

Donald Sykes: This is Don. The only thing I'd add to what Patsy said is, if at all possible, it sounds like this center was fundamentally closed down when you came.

Teresa Dewilde: It was, yes.

Donald Sykes: To find out if there was an advisory group or there were residents who were part of what was the previous organization who may be part, you know, I would try and get a support group I guess is what I'm suggesting, that you start looking and you who may have been involved in the past and see if you can build up a committee to work with you that can give you some insight and intelligence on this community that you're working in.

Teresa Dewilde: Right, yes. We actually—there was no advisory group. That was one of the first things I looked into. What I found was that I'm not sure that it was being used in the way that it was initially set up to be used. So, my initial response was to, just at least, let people use the space for gathering, for, you know, if they were doing verbal teaching type things. Our center is used for more than just computer skills. It's also used for, you know, just group—like there's groups of individuals that get together. They have the different classes like driver's ed, or they have, you know, English as a second language classes, things like that, that they've been using it as. And I've made sure that they continue with that. But the computer resource for our community has been, you

know, something that's really beyond helpful. And I get calls occasionally from residents saying is it open yet, is it ready yet, can we use it yet. So, I'm just trying to do that, and I have had no assistance since I've been here. So, you know, trying to put out a lot of fires and still get things done that need to be done. And that center is a huge center of, you know, our little community here. So ...

Donald Sykes: You need a posse.

Teresa Dewilde: I do. You want to come over?

Donald Sykes: I think I pull it from the community.

Patsy Fletcher: Let me also add...

Teresa Dewilde: I'm trying desperately.

Patsy Fletcher: If I could just add one more thing before we go on to the next questioner. Be sure and use your START business plan.

Teresa Dewilde: Right.

Patsy Fletcher: That will help you center and focus and also see where there are holes. And of course that includes doing an evaluation or survey of residents and their needs.

Teresa Dewilde: Yes, the survey's great, and that's something that we've been trying to get done, the in-between temps that I've been working with. I now have an assistant that started yesterday. So this is out—this phone conference was perfect timing for my getting started for the next week or two. So ...

Michele Higgs: Excellent, Teresa.

Teresa Dewilde: Thank you so much.

Michele Higgs: Thank you for calling in. Sarah, is anyone else on the line?

Operator: Once again, please press "star one" to ask a question. And it appears there are no further questions at this time. Oh, I apologize, there is one that queued up. We'll take our next question from Mary Brown.

Mary Brown: Hi. Unfortunately I wasn't able to get in at the beginning. But my question was do you have some sort of advice or—for rules and procedures on how tenants should use the center? And I guess my concern is we have a couple of little computers here that we had donated and we had some problems

with people using them inappropriately, I guess. And I just wondered if there was some form, or something out there that, some guidelines that we could use when we first started the Neighborhood Networks.

Michele Higgs: May I jump in here really quickly just to offer you one thing. If you have access, you know, to the Internet and all you would be able to go to the Neighborhood Networks Web site where they have the success stories. And in many instances you see how centers operate. That's one place. And I'm certain our speakers would have some other suggestions.

Mary Brown: Oh, great. OK.

Patsy Fletcher: Well, my initial response, Mary, is what is your mission statement?

Mary Brown: Yes, and we haven't even got there yet. This is super brand new. And I've kind of been inundated with helping my folks with the Medicare Part D right. But I wanted to take part of the, you know, take part in this call. So I haven't really got there yet.

Patsy Fletcher: Yes.

Mary Brown: But I have a feeling that since we already had problems that if I don't get some guidance when the day I open the door that I'm going to have some problems.

Patsy Fletcher: Well, when you—again, as a part of—and I don't know the status of your center, but if it's a brand new center then you have to have done your business plan, the START.

Mary Brown: Right, and we haven't got there yet, right.

Patsy Fletcher: OK. And so that asks you for your mission statement, what your purpose and goals are. And that should inform. But just think about why management decided to open the center, what was it that they wanted to do. You can always change your mission later.

Mary Brown: I see.

Patsy Fletcher: But if it's, you know, clear and—it sounds like maybe this is a senior center.

Mary Brown: Yes, it is.

Patsy Fletcher: So decide what it is that you want to do with that center for the senior, why do they need it there.

Mary Brown: Right.

Michele Higgs: That's good.

Mary Brown: And I'll definitely do the survey and find that out.

Patsy Fletcher: OK.

Louise Williams: This is Louise speaking. Mary, I'm thinking about after you get your mission and your business plan together and you refer to your goals and your—for accountability purposes, is also tap into other best practice centers and to try to ask your supervisor to put you in contact with mentors, people who already have quality centers in place. They can talk about their pitfalls and what to avoid and—in starting up and really help you with some of the plan in which surveys and how to really have a mentor help you in facilitating getting that started. The other thing is, I would do some outreach to your community experts. There's plenty of mentors in your community that are experts in workshops that you could include or in assisting you with the computer in – within your own residents you have experts. And I'm sure if you look at inclusiveness, bring them into helping make the center their center by having them assist you in coordinating and

looking through the surveys and, hey, let's do this, this is what I see as the goals, have a round table discussion with your residents and make them a part of the center and they will work to make—they'll be proud to make it a quality program for themselves. So I would include them.

Mary Brown: OK, that sounds great.

Louise Williams: Yes.

Michele Higgs: So did you get something to work with?

Mary Brown: Yes, yes. And I apologize for not being—you know, having my—I'm just not at that point of going through the START program and everything yet. But this gives me some guidelines maybe that will even help me when I go to do my mission statement and everything. So I appreciate the advice.

Michele Higgs: Great, great. Thanks for calling in.

Mary Brown: Thank you very much.

Michele Higgs: Sarah, have we anyone else in the queue?

Operator: We do have two other questions.

Michele Higgs: Great.

Operator: We'll take our next question from Shola Adekunle.

Shola Adekunle: Yes, Shola Adekunle.

Michele Higgs: Hello.

Shola Adekunle: Hi.

Michele Higgs: OK.

Shola Adekunle: I do appreciate the information that has been presented so far, and I'm jotting notes down. It seems very useful. My main concern right now is getting the residents motivated to utilize the center more often. Because I've had volunteers participate, but they kind of fall off because of the turnout. And so sometimes I have more volunteers than actual participants. So, I'd love to organize, you know, the volunteers as some sort of staff so that we can, you know, be more accountable and fulfill our mission but, you know, when the residents sign in here it kind of, you know, doesn't keep the volunteers motivated to continue coming.

Michele Higgs: Anybody want to take that one?

Patsy Fletcher: Well, I can say again that that is—a common problem.

Shola Adekunle: Right.

Patsy Fletcher: Almost every center has that problem of participation. And what I can say is that if you—again, I hate to go—keep going back to a survey, but maybe you need to do another survey to find out – and maybe a little more detailed, not only what kinds of programs they'd like to see but what times they're available, probe as to what some of the barriers are for them coming. Especially if you've got volunteers, and maybe you can have them help you and just do a much more detailed survey of the residents' desires to participate. And then, again, I wish that I had, you know, some pills that I could, you know, throw down on the floor of the center and it would send out waves of enticing odors or whatever to bring them in. But it's probably going to be an ongoing problem. But what you need to do is feel good about the ones who do come and then maybe ask them as well what their neighbors are saying, what – get some tips from them as to how they can get others in. But if you're got—if you're consistent, you know, you're always open when you say you're going to be open, if you've got instructors—and sometimes you need to let volunteers know that, yes, maybe we don't have enough, but we have to be consistent, and you've got the kinds of courses and

classes that residents have said they want. If you've got all of those in place, then I think you just have to keep on doing the good job that you're doing.

Michele Higgs: Thanks, Patsy. That's great. Shola, did that help?

Shola Adekunle: Yes, it does.

Michele Higgs: I also want to let you know—of course right now I can't recall which month—but one month we're going to have a call on motivating adult folks to come and use the center. So that might be of help to you as well. And what Patsy said about, you know, putting the survey together and, you know, finding out when people are available to use it. Because sometimes that's the—in this case that might not be as simple as it is, but sometimes that's as simple as it is. They just don't have activities available when they're available. So it's something to look at.

Louise Williams: If I want to—I mean, if I could I could interject a thought or two for Shola.

Shola Adekunle: Yes.

Louise Williams: This is Louise.

Shola Adekunle: Hi.

Louise Williams: Hi. And, you know, one of the things I think is real important is that it's the center provides anything that's relevant to the residents. They will come and, of course it's important that the timetable be flexible, so that it works around their schedules. But relevancy is so critical, so that your survey – you really have to pay attention and not think about what it is we can do and this is what we need to do, but think about what is it the customers are asking for. So make it relevant. I'd also suggest that people interact in various styles. So recognize learning styles of how people best learn. And have hands-on activities. Rather than being spoken to, have a variety of ways and methods that individuals can participate there. And even adults like looking around the center. So I would showcase some of those projects on the wall, any hands-on activities that you have. And certainly, you can just showcase those on the wall, so if someone comes in they say, hey, look at that. Be totally aware of what's drawing interest and perhaps get them started on some of those projects. I would think since you have two computers it's probably important to look at basic keyboarding and just have a software there so people can come in and use that on their own, self-assisted, or just maybe a workshop on computer literacy, just real basic stuff. OK?

Michele Higgs: Sounds great, Louise. Thank you so much.

Donald Sykes: This is Don. If you have volunteers, one of the things I was going to suggest is see if there are any merchants or see if your volunteers can be used to come up with ways to come up with programs that are offering things that may not relate to directly where you want to go with the residents but may meet some immediate needs of theirs to get involved in your center. And part of the goal being to create a kind of family environment where once people begin to participate you can then begin to steer them toward the kind of things that may be more long-term useful to them. But if you've got volunteers I would suggest use them to do a wider survey other than just the residents, but looking at what's in the community that the people that you want to bring into the center may need and see if you can in some ways bring those two things together.

Michele Higgs: Thanks so much, Donald. Thank you everybody. It looks like we're close to the wire on time. So I'm just going to make a couple of last announcements here. First, I want to thank our speakers. I want to thank you, Patsy Fletcher and Louise Williams and Donald Sykes, for sharing your time with us and your experience. And, finally, I want to thank my colleague, Michell Morton, for all the work she did in putting this call together and inviting the speakers. I want to remind you of the resources that are available to you through Neighborhood Networks, and that's the information line which is toll-free at 888-312-2743 and the Web site which is www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org.

I thank you so much for joining us today and remind you that our last monthly conference call for the year 2005 will take place on Tuesday, December 13, at 3:00 p.m. The topic is: Are You Ahead of The Class? Center Assessments, and Classification. And that will address tracking and evaluation and the importance of START Assessment Tool for the center classification process.

Now, Michell has one more item to address with you.

Michell Morton: Hi, everyone. I'd like to encourage everyone who — all the centers who have received technical assistance nomination letters and forms to fax them back to us at 301-519-5980. From today's call we all know that a lot of centers need help. Technical Assistance coordinators such as myself can assist you with developing your center, partnership development, work force development, outreach to residents. And we encourage you to fill out those forms so that you can receive on-site technical assistance. And once again, please fax the forms back to 301-519-5980, or if you have any questions call us at the toll-free line at 888-312-2743.

Michele Higgs: Great. Hope everybody got that. Thank you again for joining us today.

We've come to the end of this call. Take good care. Talk to you next time.

Operator: And that does conclude today's conference. We do thank you for your participation, and have a great day.

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